



Damien Dovarganes/AP

At least 11 million children are not covered by insurance

1997. It provided \$24 billion over 5 years and a total of \$39 billion over 10 years, but states have used less than 25% of the money made available so far. "It's simply

inexcusable that we've been sitting here with the money for 2 years to provide health insurance to 5 million kids, and 80% of them are still uninsured," President

Clinton said during his address to the academy.

The academy's proposal, however, goes further than the president's, and would seek to insure greater numbers of children. Under the academy's proposal, either families could choose to enroll their children in a private insurance plan or they would automatically be enrolled in a national program. This program would require an increased investment in children's health, and the academy said that it was still looking at a variety of ways to fund the proposal. Census Bureau data show that the number of children without health insurance has increased by 15.6% since President Clinton took office, to 11.1 million last year from 9.6 million in 1993. The number of uninsured children rose by 330,000 in 1998 alone, despite an exceptionally robust economy and billions of dollars of new federal money made available to pay for children's health insurance. "The world's most powerful democracy has 11 million uninsured children," said the academy's president, Dr Joel Alpert, in an address he delivered at the annual meeting. "There is no excuse for it. We can solve this problem," he said.

Study leads to a call for an end to spanking

David Spurgeon, Quebec

A Canadian study has shown that adults who reported being slapped or spanked as children were twice as likely as those who did not to have current problems of alcohol or drug misuse and to show antisocial behavior. The study, in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (1999;161:805-809), examined 4888 subjects, ranging in age from 15 to 64 years, none of whom reported a childhood history of sexual abuse or physical abuse, apart from spanking.

Measures included a self-administered questionnaire with a question about frequency of slapping and spanking during

childhood, as well as an interviewer-administered questionnaire to measure psychiatric disorder.

The frequency of slapping or spanking varied from "never" (20%) and "rarely" (41%) to "sometimes" (33%) and "often" (6%). Those from the last two groups had significantly higher lifetime rates of anxiety disorders. There was also an association with major depression, but it was not significant.

Linear trend analyses showed significant association between increasing frequency of reported slapping or spanking and increasing rates of lifetime psychiatric disorder. In an

accompanying editorial, Murray Strauss of the Family Research Laboratory, University of New Hampshire, wrote: "Ending spanking is a mode of primary prevention to which doctors can make an important contribution." He continued: "This will not be easy, because most doctors, like most patients, believe that spanking is sometimes necessary."

In Canada and the United States, corporal punishment of children by their parents is exempt from prosecution under the criminal code. Dr Strauss says that the current study adds to mounting evidence "that the time has come to end that exception."